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Teachers' Willingness and Preparedness to Deal with Foreign Cultural Issues in the Classroom

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Introduction

Due to technological advances in communication, the world has become a global village. In this modern world, English is used as an international language in diplomacy, trade, science, and tourism. Therefore, non-native speakers frequently find themselves face to face with native speakers of English.

As language and culture are inextricably tied together, native speakers of English reflect their own culture in their speech patterns. For this reason and in response to the enormous demand for English, some language teaching theorists (Brooks 1960, Lado 1971, Morain 1971, Brown 1980, Rivers 1983) stress the need to teach the target culture to non-native speakers of English not only because the transmission of this culture breaks down isolation but also helps to achieve technological development.

On the contrary, other language teaching theorists (Rogers 1982, Gem and Margart Alptekin 1984) stress the need to work from local varieties of English and to produce local teaching materials that are culturally appropriate for non-native speakers of English. They fear that learning the target culture may result in undermining the non-native speakers' identity or lead to psychological problems and undesirable personality traits such as frustration, self-alienation, and feelings of inferiority or resentment. They also claim that the English of science and technology is free from the culture of a particular country, and thus it is not an instrument of domination of one country over another.

To bridge the gap between the conservative view and the progressive one concerning the role of the target culture in the

EFL classroom, in the *Proceedings of the First National Symposium on English Teaching in Egypt* (1981:94), Araby suggests that "EFL learners should be exposed to the target culture at a receptive level, but the productive output should reflect their own culture. In this way, the student is, in a sense, bicultural and bilingual". Prodromu (1988:83) suggests bridging the gap in another way by making "pedagogic capital out of languages and cultures in contact."

To conclude this introductory section, it seems to the writer that all the previously-mentioned theories should be subjected to empirical research.

Overview of the literature

In reviewing the literature bearing on the study, the researcher found that considerable studies have been conducted to test the effect of attitudes toward the target country and people on learning a second/foreign language (Lambert 1967, Gardener and Lambert 1972, Stauble 1978, Gardner 1980, Gardner et al. 1985).

Some researchers have examined the effect of cross-cultural background on the reading or listening comprehension of second and/or foreign language learners (Gatbonton and Tucker 1971, Kujoory 1978, Steffensen et al. 1978, Johnson 1981, Steffensen and Colker 1982).

Few researchers have dealt with attitudes and cultural distance in second and/or foreign language acquisition (Schumann 1976, Svanes 1987, 1988).

Another area of second and/or foreign language research has sought to elicit the views of teachers or learners on cultural topics for language teaching (Adaskou et al. 1990, Prodromou 1992).

As shown from all the previously-mentioned lines of research it seems that further empirical studies are needed to investigate teachers' willingness and preparedness to deal with foreign cultures in the EFL classroom because there is no published research in this area.

Purpose of the study

This study has three purposes: 1) to determine teachers' willingness and preparedness to deal with foreign cultures in the EFL classroom, 2) to determine whether a significant difference exists between the mean scores of rural and urban teachers with respect to their willingness to deal with foreign cultures, and 3) to investigate the relationship between teachers' willingness to deal with foreign cultures and their estimation of their own cultural awareness.

Importance of the study

This study provides the ground on which course designers can take decisions about the inclusion of culture in the EFL curriculum. It also serves as a basis for promoting teachers' cognitive development and affective growth in dealing with foreign cultures.

Research questions

This study was conducted to investigate the following questions:

- 1) Do teachers involved in the study perceive themselves as willing to deal with foreign cultures in the EFL classroom?
- 2) Do teachers involved in the study perceive themselves as prepared to deal with foreign cultures?
- 3) Is there a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of rural teachers and urban ones on willingness to deal with foreign cultures?
- 4) Is there a statistically significant relationship between teachers' willingness and their estimation of their own preparedness to deal with foreign cultures?

Method**Sample**

This study is based upon a random sample of 200 secondary school teachers drawn from the entire population of secondary school EFL teachers in Menoufia and Qina (100 per governorate).

These two governorates were chosen because Qina is richer in opportunities for communication in the target language with tourists than Menoufia in which teachers afford no opportunities for such interactions, thus constituting two different environments that are likely to bear on teachers' willingness and preparedness to deal with foreign cultures.

The sample draws its subjects from the rural and urban population in the two governorates (50 rural/50 urban). Sampling was carried out in these stages: 1) EFL teachers in the two governorates were divided into two groups (rural and urban) according to their regions of birth, residence and work, 2) a slip of paper with the name and group number of each teacher in the population was placed in a container and mixed thoroughly, and 3) subjects were randomly selected to access equal numbers of rural and urban teachers.

Instruments

In order to obtain data necessary for the study, a five-point continuum agreement questionnaire, that comprises 30 statements of willingness and preparedness (15 items for each), was constructed. The statements were systematically arranged, one willingness item after a preparedness one (see Appendix).

To make sure that teachers would produce truthful answers, clear directions for recording responses were employed.

Background information about the respondents (area of residence, place of birth and school locale) was also obtained from the questionnaire.

A panel of experts in the fields of methodology and psychology was consulted to establish the content validity of the questionnaire regarding the measurement of teachers' willingness and preparedness to deal with foreign cultures in the EFL classroom.

The questionnaire was piloted with 20 secondary school teachers, not participating in the study. As a result, its internal consistency reliability was estimated by the split-half method in which the first and second fifteen items were scored separately.

The correlation coefficient between the two sets of scores was 0.82.

Procedures

The questionnaire was administered during the first two weeks of January, 1993.

Then, depending on the positive or negative direction of statements, the questionnaire items were scored on 5, 4, 3, 2 or 1 basis. For positive statements: strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, uncertain = 3, disagree = 2, and strongly disagree = 1. For negative statements: strongly agree = 1, agree = 2, uncertain = 3, disagree = 4, and strongly disagree = 5.

The values for all items on each variable were summed to provide an overall score for each teacher on each variable separately.

The data were statistically analyzed by utilizing the mean scores with standard deviations, the t-test and the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient.

Results and discussions

To answer the research questions addressed by the study, questionnaire responses were statistically analysed and discussed in this section.

Table 1
Mean Score and Standard Deviation
for the Overall Sample on Willingness

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Willingness	200	31.80	8.71

As indicated in Table 1, the answer to the first research question appears to be negative. This finding may be due to the false

stereotypes which constitute teachers' images of the foreign cultures. In addition, there seem to be three other reasons beyond this finding. The first of these reasons may be distrust in foreigners because Egypt history reflects invasions, wars, and occupations. The second reason is that Egyptian teachers do not have access to opportunities of real language use with foreigners. The third reason may be teachers' lack of cultural awareness and strategies for integrating culture with language.

Table 2
Mean Score and Standard Deviation
for the Overall Sample on Preparedness

Variable	N	Mean	SD
Preparedness	200	32.15	8.66

As shown in Table 2, the answer to the second research question appears to be negative. This noticeable lack of preparedness to deal with foreign cultures in the classroom may be attributed to the neglect of foreign cultures in both preservice and inservice training programs.

Table 3
The Difference between the Mean Scores of
Rural and Urban Teachers
on Willingness

Group	N	Mean	SD	t
Rural Teachers	100	31.88	8.56	0.13
Urban Teachers	100	31.72	8.87	

Table 3 shows no significant difference ($t = 0.13$) between rural and urban teachers with respect to their willingness to deal with foreign cultures in the EFL classroom. The answer to the third research question, based on this finding, appears to be negative. This result may be due to the fact that all Egyptians adhere closely to their own culture which contributed a great deal to the civilization of this world. Another explanation could be the life styles of rural areas which have become similar to urban ones owing to the increased mobility of rural inhabitants and their contact with urban people through modern communications and electronic media.

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between teachers' willingness and their preparedness to deal with foreign cultures in the EFL classroom. The correlation coefficient that was obtained ($r = 0.62$) was significant at the 0.01 level. Based on this finding, the answer to the fourth research question appears to be positive. However, there is no evidence that cultural awareness increases teachers' willingness to bring foreign cultures in the EFL classroom. Learning about foreign cultures may lead to favourable or unfavourable attitudes towards these cultures. Only an experiment with appropriate controls can determine that the positive relationship between willingness to deal with foreign cultures and cultural awareness is causal.

Recommendations

Based upon the results of the study, the writer offers the following recommendations:

1) The teaching and learning of English at the faculties engaged in the preparation of teachers should be integrated with the cultures of English-speaking people by exposing prospective teachers to samples that are implicitly and naturally culture-loaded. Recommended ways include:

- a) Introducing prospective teachers to contemporary literature that deals with current ideas, values and customs of English-speaking people.

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- b) Turning to foreign newspapers and magazines for reading with a cultural focus.
 - c) Exposing prospective teachers regularly to the varieties of native speech through native teachers, discs and tapes.
 - d) Developing special methods and techniques for teaching culture in the methodology program.
 - e) Incorporating non-verbal communication, stylistics and sociolinguistics into pre-service training courses.
 - f) Utilizing video-tapes and other audio-visual aids which are made in normal settings of foreign cultures.
 - g) Including cultural awareness in examinations.
- 2) Teachers already in the field should receive training programs in cultural awareness under the supervision of the faculties of education.
- 3) Prospective and current teachers' attitudes towards foreign cultures can become tolerant through exposure to the reality of these cultures in these ways:
- a) Employing more native speakers of English as university teachers and teacher trainers.
 - b) Giving more opportunities to university teachers, teacher trainers and senior secondary school teachers to mix socially with native speakers of English.
 - c) Questioning stereotypes about foreign cultures by pointing out to differences among people within a given culture.
- 4) The following assumptions should constitute a preliminary framework in dealing with foreign cultures:
- a) Egyptians cannot isolate themselves from other cultures. So, it is better to deal with these cultures in harmony with our own values than to let students face and misunderstand them.
 - b) People from different cultures should know and respect one another in order to establish peace, mutual understanding and global awareness.

- c) Foreign cultures should be transmitted in a way that does not distort or diminish the culture of learners and teachers.
- d) Value-judgments should be avoided in dealing with foreign cultures lest they should result in illogical conclusions.
- e) Learners and teachers should help set goals for cultural awareness.
- f) Learning about foreign cultures should not mean regarding these cultures as standards. What learners should accomplish is only to know about these cultures in order to understand native speakers' behavior without forsaking their own culture or national identity.
- g) To keep students' commitment to their own culture, knowledge of cultural differences should not be introduced in the preparatory stage.
- h) There is always something to learn from other cultures.

Suggestions for future research

The following areas for further research are suggested by the study:

- 1) Investigating the effect of learning foreign cultures on self-identity and citizenship.
- 2) Examining the tension that may arise when foreign cultures come into contact with Egyptian culture in classroom contexts.
- 3) Investigating the effect of culturally-loaded materials versus culturally neutral materials on accuracy and fluency.
- 4) Investigating the effect of contact with foreigners on willingness to deal with foreign cultures.
- 5) Determining students' willingness to learn about the cultures of English-speaking countries.
- 6) Replicating this study in other areas to confirm its results.

Implications of the study

This study has important implications not only for teaching but also for developing appropriate language teaching materials

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The first implication that can be drawn from the results of the study is that any attempts to add a cultural component to the EFL curriculum are bound to fail because teachers are not convinced of the need for such a cultural component nor prepared for teaching this new aspect. The results of the study revealed that teachers are unwilling to deal with foreign cultures in the classroom. Therefore, their classroom behavior will reflect this attitude towards their students as "students tend to view their teachers as models for the kinds of attitudes they develop" (Lindgren 1956:230). Additionally, any attempts to force teachers to deal with foreign cultures in the classroom may lead to resistance or surface level acceptance. In other words, the classroom atmosphere may take on a coercive or rebellious tone.

The results of the study also showed that teachers are not acquainted with knowledge about foreign cultures or techniques of teaching cultural awareness. This lack of cultural awareness and techniques of dealing with cultural issues in the classroom may prevent implementation.

Another implication is that it would be beneficial to view teachers' affective and cognitive domains as related factors. The interaction of these domains may influence success in the classroom. The results of the study revealed a strong correlation between teachers' cultural awareness and their willingness to deal with foreign cultures. Therefore, there is evidence that preservice and inservice training may promote teachers' willingness to bring culture in the EFL classroom.

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Appendix

**A questionnaire for measuring teachers'
willingness and preparedness to deal with foreign
cultures**

Dear teacher,

This questionnaire has been designed to determine your willingness and preparedness to deal with foreign cultures*. Please encircle the choice that best applies to you. Your honest answers are extremely important to the success of this study.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,
Dr. Abdel Salam A. El Koumy
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Suez Canal University, Suez Branch.

* Culture is the ideas, values, customs, beliefs, artforms and achievements of a society.

Directions for recording responses

Encircle 1 **STRONGLY DISAGREE**—if the statement definitely does not apply to you.

Encircle 2 **DISAGREE**— if the statement does not apply to you.

Encircle 3 **UNCERTAIN**— if you are undecided about the statement.

Encircle 4 **AGREE**— if the statement applies to you.

Encircle 5 **STRONGLY AGREE** — if the statement definitely applies to you.

Please be sure to answer all statements.

Please encircle the answer that applies to you:

1. Where do you live?

- a) at a village b) in a town or city

2. Where were you born?

- a) at a village b) in a town or city

3. Where is your school situated?

- a) at a village b) in a town or city

Questionnaire statements

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----------|
| 1. | One must be bicultural to be bilingual. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 2. | I feel that the cultures of English-speaking people are too difficult for me to teach. | 5 4 3 2 1 |
| 3. | I believe that there is always something to learn from other cultures. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 4. | When I was a university student, literature was taught with reference to culture. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 5. | If I had the opportunity, I would mix socially with native speakers of English. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 6. | I believe I am knowledgeable about the cultures of English-speaking countries. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 7. | Cultural information makes the foreign language lesson more interesting. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 8. | When I was a university student, I learned how to teach culture. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 9. | I approach cultural differences in a non-judgmental way. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 10. | In-service training programs provide cultural insights. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 11. | The transition from monoculturalism to bi- or multi-culturalism is a must in today's world. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 12. | My familiarity with the cultures of English-speaking people derives from my personal contact with foreigners. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 13. | It is important to teach non-verbal communication in our English classes. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 14. | I possess an understanding of the principal ways in which the cultures of English speaking countries resemble and differ from my own culture. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. | Without bridge building between culture and language, one cannot communicate with foreigners effectively. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. | I possess an understanding of the principal ways in which the cultures of English-speaking countries resemble and differ from one another. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

17. Literature of the English-speaking people is the best bridge to the understanding of their culture. 12 3 4 5
18. When I was a university student, I studied micro- and macro-contents in which the cultures of English-speaking people are embedded. 12 3 4 5
19. I accept people from other cultures when they act according to their own values, not mine. 12 3 4 5
20. My familiarity with the cultures of English speaking people has been achieved through following foreign films and programs on radio and television. 12 3 4 5
21. EFL teachers should stimulate discussion about culture and encourage appreciation of cultural diversity. 12 3 4 5
22. When I was a university student, I studied sociolinguistics. 12 3 4 5
23. One cannot avoid culture when one teaches a foreign language. 12 3 4 5
24. I speak and write English using the authentic patterns of the language. 12 3 4 5
25. The cultures of English-speaking people are conglomerates (a collection of) bad behaviors. 54 3 2 1
26. When I was a university student, I studied English-speaking people's behavior in natural settings with a focus on the cultural interpretation of behavior. 12 3 4 5
27. I feel that the cultures of English-speaking people are too difficult for students to learn. 54 3 2 1
28. My familiarity with the English-speaking people has been achieved through reading foreign newspapers and magazines. 12 3 4 5
29. I feel more secure with language teaching materials based on my own culture. 54 3 2 1
30. When I was a university student I studied the English language with a focus on its linguistic features instead of its cultural features. 54 3 2 1